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ABSTRACT

The U.S. National Education Goals were enacted into federal law in 1994 as the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act." The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin is addressing the first of these goals, which states that by the year 2000 all children will enter school ready to learn. This paper describes the need for quality services to preschool children in order to achieve the first national education goal and identifies ways in which school and public libraries can work together to provide such services. The five dimensions that define school readiness are: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language usage; and cognition and general knowledge. The paper provides a summary report of a prototype that was developed to achieve the goal of school readiness, and then considers the prototype in light of the mission and services of school libraries, highlighting areas where cooperation between school and public libraries can further enhance the achievement of school readiness. Early childhood is a time of tremendous growth and development, and, therefore, potential. The work that libraries can do with young children, with families, with each other, and with other child advocates, can assist in maximizing that potential. (SWC)

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Preschool Partnerships: School and Public Library Cooperation to Facilitate School Readiness

by
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The National Education Goals were established by the President of the United States and the Governors of the fifty states in 1989 and enacted into federal law in March 1994 as the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" Public Law 103-227. In May of 1994 the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin held a five day Institute funded by the US Department of Education entitled "Achieving School Readiness: Public Libraries and the First of the National Education Goals." The first of the National Education Goals is: By the year 2000, all children will enter school ready to learn.

The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the need for quality services to preschool children in order to achieve the first national education goal and to identify ways in which school and public libraries can work together to provide such services. As a means of establishing the educational context, the paper will first describe the five critical dimensions that define school readiness in preschool children. Second, the paper will offer a summary report of the "Achieving School Readiness Institute" and the prototype that was developed by the participants. Finally, the prototype will be considered in light of the mission and services of school libraries, highlighting areas where cooperation between school and public libraries can further enhance the achievement of school readiness.

The Five Critical Dimensions of School Readiness

According to the National Education Goals Report (1992), "being ready to learn means more than having the ability to count and recognize letters in the alphabet. Children need to be healthy, and socially and emotionally ready for school" (p. 8). While there are no specific, objective measures of "readiness to learn" the National Education Goals panel has identified five critical dimensions that define school readiness. These dimension include:

- **Physical Well-Being and Motor Development**
  Health and physical growth, ranging from being rested, fed, properly immunized, and healthy to having such abilities as running, jumping, and using crayons and puzzles.
- **Social and Emotional Development**
  The sense of personal well-being that allows a child to participate fully and constructively in classroom activities.
- **Approaches Toward Learning**
  The curiosity, creativity, motivation, independence, cooperativeness, interest, and persistence that enable children from all cultures to maximize their learning.
- **Language Usage**
  The talking, listening, scribbling, and com-posing that enable children to communicate effectively and express thoughts, feel-ings, and experiences.
- **Cognition and General Knowledge**
  Familiarity with basic information -- includ-ing patterns and relationships, and cause and effect -- needed to solve problems in everyday life. (National Education Goals Report, 1992, p. 9).

Achieving School Readiness Institute and Prototype

These five critical dimensions of readiness were used as the organizing structure for the "Achieving School Readiness Institute." Experts from a variety of academic disciplines other than library and information science were invited to address each of the critical areas with the intent of broadening understanding of the issues surrounding school readiness.

Dr. Stuart Reifel, Professor in Early Childhood Education at the University of Texas at Austin, addressed physical well-

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being and motor development in his lecture: "Preschool Play: Some Roots for Literacy." Drawing upon the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, and citing current research studies, Reifel suggested that the physical activities identified as play are the "context within which children learn, explore, and acquire foundations that they will draw upon later in school." Reifel maintained that play is a significant means for developing cognitive structures, enhancing social development, and exploring symbolic thought. In relating play specifically to the library and literacy, Reifel said, "Hearing stories (a social activity) gives us something to play about. Playing (frequently a social activity) allows us to create stories." He concluded with the suggestion that libraries develop "playful, welcoming environments where children can explore and imagine with books" and that librarians help children to "play appropriately in libraries."

The dimension of social and emotional development was considered by Dr. Alice Honig, a Professor at Syracuse University in the Department of Child and Family Studies, College of Human Development. Dr. Honig's presentation, entitled "Children's Socioemotional Development: Implications for School Readiness," began with the premise that "intellectual abilities of children and their potential for school readiness and early learning can be optimized only when their emotional security, self-esteem, and social supports from intimate others are nurtured as well as their cognitive competence." Although children, from infancy, exhibit certain temperament types and patterns of emotional response, their understanding of the range and complexity of emotions is not quick to develop and can be enhanced or hampered by their adult caregivers For this reason, Honig suggested that libraries can be invaluable resources both in terms of materials and programs, for promoting "effective parenting and thus children's positive socioemotional development."

Austin College's Professor of Psychology Dr. Karen Nelson explored approaches to learning in her lecture: "Learning Styles in Preschool Children." She stressed that contemporary research is utilizing sophisticated techniques for assessing the physiological reality of learning style and its behavioral implications. Nelson emphasized that the literature argues that we must accept diversity in style, with no single style model purported to explain broad individual differences in learning; that style is being examined in relation to a)temperament; b) intellectual ability; c) developmental status. In regard to the delivery of library programs to preschool children, Nelson suggested, that librarians increase their sensitivity to the variety of learning styles their audiences may seem to display, while avoiding efforts to assess or label children according to style. Rather than "worrying about the child's style," Nelson recommends, "think instead about the ways in which you can use diverse styles in your presentations in hopes that once in a while a child whose parent or teacher has a different style may discover that there is a style that affirms who she is."

Dr. Sarah Hudelson, a professor at Arizona State University's Division of Curriculum and Instruction, addressed language usage in her lecture: "Preschool Children's Oral and Written Language: Issues and Challenges." She summarized current research on young children's oral and written language acquisition, emphasizing that children coming to school have already acquired a high degree of linguistic competence that reflects the values and culture of the speech communities in which they live. Even among native speakers of English, Hudelson maintains that there is "significant variation in the ways in which families and communities use oral and written language." It is the responsibility of the teacher, and the librarian then, to acknowledge what children already know about language, and to understand and respect the diversity of language and language style that children bring to the preschool setting.

In addressing general knowledge and cognition, Dr. William Teale, of the University of Texas at San Antonio, Division of Education, College of Behavioral Science lectured on "Early Language and Literacy Development: Foundations for School Success." He focused on the characteristics of positive literacy environments for young children in home, community, and library settings. Highlighting storybook reading, exploratory writing and invented spelling, "environmental print," and literacy play activities, Teale suggested that each con-

tribute to children's knowledge and cognitive development and to their success in school. "The key," he claimed, "lies in children seeing literacy as an enjoyable and valued part of their lives. We help them see this not be devising literacy lessons but by helping to create contexts in which children experience the power and joy of reading and writing."

These lectures, which affirmed in many ways the role of young children as active and engaged learners from earliest infancy, were delivered over a period of five days to the "Achieving School Readiness" participants. The fifty participants, who came to the Institute from twenty three states in the US, included library school educators, state library youth consultants, youth services coordinators from regional library systems, and practicing children's librarians, as well as members of the early childhood care and education communities. Working in small groups, the participants discussed the presentations in light of their own knowledge and experience, ultimately developing a prototype for public library service to young children.

The prototype begins with a mission statement, and continues with four sections addressing the services, skills and attitudes, organizational structures, and resources that will be required for public libraries to actively engage in the national call for school readiness for all children by the year 2000. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full description of the prototype, it is appropriate however, to share the mission statement, as well as the introductory remarks for each of the four sections.

Mission

An essential mission of public libraries is to ensure that young children receive services and support that help prepare them for success in school and to become life long learners. This mission is accomplished by:

- adopting the role of "Preschoolers Door to Learning" as a national priority in public libraries;
- centering children's services around the developmental needs of children and their families;
- building coalitions and developing a shared vision with the early care and education community.

Services

Library services for young children and their families must be responsive to the *whole* child, his or her family, and caregivers. Services must address the child prenatally through age eight. Services must be developed in consultation and collaboration with the early care and education community.

Skills and Attitudes

Library staff must embrace the belief that all children and their families are library customers of primary importance and that librarians share responsibility for ensuring that children succeed in school and become life long learners. Librarians must form partnerships with parents, early care and education providers, and other community-based, youth serving agencies to provide appropriate services and support for young children and their families.

Organizational Structures

Realizing the vision of service and support for young children and their families will require new organizational structures within individual libraries as well as in the broader library community. Changes will be required in library policies, in personnel deployment, in facilities design and utilization, in patterns of communication, and in education for librarianship.

Resources

Library resources are the basis for the delivery of service and must be equitably distributed to ensure the attainment of the library's mission. In order to serve and support young children and their families, funding must be secured through public and private sources. Grant funding for youth services projects must be pursued. Governmental support must be sought through the establishment of a LSCA Title dedicated to early childhood and through specified funding in every child care or related bill presented to state legislatures or the US Congress with libraries named as recipients.

Partnerships for Enhancing School Readiness

While the prototype was developed to define early childhood services in public libraries, there are elements that are

equally appropriate for school library media centers. In considering the Institute as a whole, three important concepts emerged.

- emphasis on the child, and the family, rather than on library materials,
- emphasis on developmentally appropri-ate practice,
- emphasis on partnerships -- partnerships with parents, with early childhood edu-cators and caregivers, and with childhood health care providers.

The first question to consider is *why* should school media specialists be concerned with the young child? Services to this clientele are traditionally the responsibility of public libraries through storytime programs for toddlers and preschoolers. While this is true, it is also true that young children are involved in more formal education programs at earlier and earlier ages. Public school kindergarten for five year olds and an increasing number of pre-kindergarten programs for four, and even three year olds, make this a patron group that schools and public libraries are both serving. Additionally, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identifies the period of young childhood as extending from birth through age eight. With this definition in mind, school and public librarians share an early childhood clientele that extends through the third grade. At the other end of the spectrum, high school librarians may find an early childhood client group in the early childhood and family studies programs offered through their home economics departments, and in the child care programs that high schools are now offering to the teen parents among their student bodies.

Given then, that school librarians have an early childhood population to serve, *how* can services best be offered? The NAEYC suggests that children are best served through developmentally appropriate practices. Such practices "reflect what is known about how children develop and learn (what is age appropriate) and...are sensitive to individual and cultural variation (what is individually appropriate)" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 3). To effectively implement developmentally appropriate practice in library programming takes a knowledge of child development, educational and learning theories, and library materials. School librarians, with their background training from colleges of education and years of classroom experience, may have substantial expertise to share with pubic librarians in this regard. Similarly, public librarians, may enjoy a wide range of experience with children from this younger age group, and a concentrated knowledge of the books and library materials designed for them. Sharing of such knowledge and experience between library professionals in school and public library settings, can only increase the quality of the programs offered and materials available.

Partnerships between librarians are only the first of the cooperative undertakings that can and should be pursued. The speakers at the Institute and participants working on the prototype, emphasized again and again the need for a "shared vision" in regard to services for young children. Parents, preschool teachers, child care providers, and health care professionals are all concerned with the growth, development, and ultimate success of young children. Learning is an interactive process. Children must interact with their environments, their peers, and caring adults in order to learn. Similar interaction between all those who seek to aid young children can lead to similar learning. School and public librarians, as an established team, must approach parent groups, child care advocates, health clinic personnel, and early childhood educators, not just as library promoters and materials experts, but as active and involved learners, seeking to enhance and coordinate efforts on behalf of young children. A shared vision begins with shared concerns and shared knowledge. Lasting and profitable partnerships are not based on the question "what can you do for us?" but on the question "what can we do for you?" and more importantly, "what can we do together, for young children?"

Conclusion

Early childhood is a time of tremendous growth and development. According to US Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders, "Children know half as much as they will ever know by the time they are four years old." With this is mind, young childhood can be seen as a period of tremendous po-

tential. The work that librarians do with young children, with families, with each other, and with other child advocates, can assist in maximizing that potential.

Dr. Judith Lindfors offers an interes-ting distinction between teaching and learn-ing. She suggests that the efforts of one individual, through planning, conducting ac-tivities, talking, to increase another's know-ledge or skill can be called teaching. Learn-ing however, is an "individual's own sense-making activity" (Lindfors, 1984, p. 600). While some librarians, either in school or in public libraries, may not comfortably accept the role of teacher, certainly we can all support the idea that libraries are institu-tions of learning. Libraries are places where people of all ages, can find help for "making sense of things." Young children need experiences, not just to make sense about what books are and how stories work. They need experiences that address their widest range of interests, that engage them in making sense of the whole of life. Many such experiences can and should be offered in libraries.

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*The text of the papers delivered at the "Achieving School Readiness" Institute, as well as the complete Prototype of Public Library Services for Young Children and Their Families will be published by ALA Editions early in 1995. For additional information regarding the Institute or the expected publication, please contact the authors at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712-1276. Fax: 512-471-3971